

STATEMENT OF
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U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE, FOREST SERVICE
BEFORE THE
UNITED STATES SENATE
COMMITTEE ENERGY AND NATURAL RESOURCES, SUBCOMMITTEE ON PUBLIC LANDS, FORESTS
AND MINING
REGARDING:

S. 91 – “Western Wildfire Support Act”
S. 140 – “WILDFIRE PREVENTION ACT”
S. 764 – “CORE ACT”
S. 888 – “OREGON RECREATION ENHANCEMENT ACT”
S. 902 – “WILDFIRE RESPONSE AND PREPAREDNESS ACT”
S. 945 – “SMITH RIVER NATIONAL RECREATION ACT”
S. 1005 – “SOUTHERN NEVADA ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND CONSERVATION ACT”
S. 1228 – “COST-SHARING REQUIREMENT YOUTH AND CONSERVATION CORP PROJECTS”
S. 1319 – “PECOS WATERSHED WITHDRAWAL”
S. 1341 – “SARVIS CREEK WILDERNESS”
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S. 1860 – “BRIAN HEAD TOWN LAND CONVEYANCE ACT”
S. 2016 – “CHUGACH ALASKA LAND EXCHANGE OIL SPILL RECOVERY ACT”
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S. 2262 – “AMERICAN VOICES IN FEDERAL LANDS ACT”

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Chairman Barrasso, Ranking Member Cortez Masto, and Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to present the views of the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) on several bills pertaining to the USDA Forest Service. We defer to the U.S. Department of the Interior (DOI) for its views on those elements of the bills that would affect federal lands under its jurisdiction.

Several of the bills under discussion today are important efforts to address the wildland fire crisis. The Administration is taking bold actions to transform the wildfire response system to meet today’s wildfire crisis. Recently, USDA and DOI announced coordinated action to implement President Trump’s Executive Order 14308, *Empowering Commonsense Wildfire Prevention and Response*, to more closely align operations between the two Departments. USDA and DOI are diligently working toward a unification of Federal wildfire response and activities into a unified U.S. Wildland Fire Service within DOI, where practical and consistent with

applicable law, and look forward to working with Congress to quickly implement this unification in support of a more efficient national wildfire response.

S. 91, “Western Wildfire Support Act”

S. 91 seeks to improve wildfire preparation by directing the Department and DOI to report to Congress on funds obligated and used for the Wildland Fire Management account, review and regularly update existing “spatial fire management policies,” and study the integration of local firefighters in wildfire responses. The bill also requires the Department and DOI to expedite the permitting and placement of wildfire detection equipment, expand eligibility for financial assistance for the acquisition of firefighting slip-on tanker units to include Indian tribes, and study and report on drone incursions on wildfire suppression operations, and wildfire response technology development. Lastly, the bill authorizes the Department of Homeland Security, through the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), to support post-disaster assistance and online resource guides, codifies the role of Burned Area Emergency Response (BAER) Teams in coordinating immediate post-wildfire emergency stabilization, and establishes a prize competition for wildfire-related invasive species reduction technology advancements.

The USDA supports the intent of S. 91 and would like to work with the Subcommittee and bill sponsors to make technical adjustments. For example, the Forest Service recommends expanding the definition of “fireshed” to better account for non-forested vegetation types on Federal lands, such as shrublands and grasslands, which are also part of the Federal estate subject to wildfires.

S. 140, “Wildfire Prevention Act”

Title I—Accomplishments Over Rhetoric, aims to dramatically accelerate hazardous fuels treatments and improve reporting of accomplishments and accountability. Section 101 sets annual hazardous fuels targets to increase by at least 40 percent by FY2029 on National Forest System (NFS) and Bureau of Land Management (BLM) lands compared to FY2019–2023 averages. Section 102 requires the Secretaries of Agriculture and the Interior to submit yearly reports providing new details on the acres treated by mechanical thinning or prescribed fire. Section 103 aims to standardize reporting of accomplishments for the President’s budget. Section 104 requires regional carbon accounting to determine whether NFS lands are carbon sinks or sources and publish that information on Forest Service websites. Lastly, section 105 requires the development of performance metrics tied to wildfire risk reduction outcomes.

The Forest Service is supportive of this opportunity to accelerate hazardous fuels treatments while providing more flexibility to quickly reduce wildfire risks, such as the exemption of hazardous fuels targets from National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) review.

Among several reporting requirements, Title I requires that USDA and DOI provide information to Congress and the public on hazardous fuels reduction activities. The bill directs that the acreage reported in the budget materials counts each acre treated only once regardless of whether multiple hazardous fuels reduction activities were carried out on each acre. The Department notes that using “acres treated” as a metric for assessing wildfire risk reduction efforts may not effectively illustrate the intensive work required to successfully treat certain high-risk areas. For example, even small areas with dense fuel loads may take multiple rounds of treatment to reduce hazardous fuels but

ultimately result in a significant reduction to wildfire risk to people or infrastructure. New models for better assessing the efficacy of fire risk reduction are currently in development and may ultimately provide more useful and informative metrics compared to solely using acres treated. Further, the Department recommends that the Sponsor consider amending the definition of “hazardous fuels reduction activity” to include other methods commonly used, such as manual, chemical, and biological treatments. Finally, while Forest Service reports on accomplishments are reported annually, there is a delay between the end of the fiscal year and the reporting date to provide time to compile all the information. The Forest Service recommends adjusting the dates accordingly.

Title II—Forest Management, provides federal land managers more flexibility to more quickly reduce wildfire risks. Section 201 expands existing authority for removing hazardous trees near power lines, extending the zone for hazard tree removal from 10 to 50 feet, and streamlining the process without separate timber sale transactions. Section 202 increases the Agency’s flexibility in smaller removals by raising the threshold for the value that would require timber sales from \$10,000 to \$55,000. Section 203 directs the Secretary of Agriculture to develop a new categorical exclusion (CE) for the removal of high-priority hazard trees near infrastructure, including roads, trails, and recreation sites, with a 3,000-acre limit on project size. Section 204 entitles local governments and Tribes to intervene in lawsuits and to be a full participant in any settlement negotiation concerning adjacent federal projects aimed at reducing risks from wildfire, insects, or disease, or involving revenue-generating timber harvests. Lastly, section 205 requires the agencies to develop strategies for using livestock grazing as a tool to reduce wildfire risks on federal land.

USDA appreciates Congress’s efforts to facilitate more efficient management of powerline facility rights-of-way on NFS lands. The current forest management authority allows for disposal of timber associated with vegetation management for powerline facilities and other administrative uses without a separate timber sale. Raising the threshold for the value that would require timber sales from \$10,000 to \$55,000 in smaller removals would also be helpful. We are interested in a clear authority to expand the zone for hazard tree removal. USDA looks forward to working with the Committee and bill sponsors to fully realize the bill’s intent.

The Forest Service believes a categorical exclusion in support of hazard tree removals would be beneficial. Current hazard tree environmental compliance is conducted through an Environmental Assessment (EA) or smaller scale CEs that cover these activities for related purposes (road maintenance, timber salvage, administrative site maintenance, sanitation harvests and recreation site maintenance). A specific CE just on hazard trees will allow direct support to enhance human health and safety, protect property, and ensure access. To further support the goals of this title, the Department recommends that the Sponsor expand the definition of “hazard trees” to include those likely to come within 150 feet of an electric powerline. In addition, Forest Service notes that the bill only directs the Forest Service to develop a categorical exclusion to address hazard trees and recommends that this provision also includes the Department of the Interior.

The USDA would like to work with the Committee to better understand the intent of Section 204 that would allow States and Tribes to intervene in lawsuits and to be a full participant in any settlement negotiation, which could have unintended consequences.

Lastly, USDA supports section 205 on strategic grazing to reduce wildfire risk and would like to work with the sponsor and Committee on clarifying language.

Title III—Cultural Change in Agencies, aims to create a cultural shift in land management agencies, giving agencies the authority to be more proactive and innovative in reducing the risk of wildfires. Section 301 requires federal agencies to make greater use of existing streamlined environmental review authorities, such as authorities under the Healthy Forests Restoration Act and Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, to accelerate forest health and wildfire risk reduction projects. Section 302 establishes a public-private partnership program to pilot new wildfire prevention, detection, communication, and suppression technologies on federal lands, prioritizing emerging technologies. Lastly, section 303 repeals the FLAME Act reporting requirements.

The Forest Service uses and appreciates the authorities referred to in Section 301. However, the agency has other authorities that may be more appropriate and more streamlined for NEPA reviews, depending on the specific nature of the proposal, ecosystem, stakeholder groups, and land management plan. Examples include categorical exclusions and emergency authorities. Retaining discretion at the local unit level with the direction of using the most efficient, appropriate review tool would be preferred. The Forest Service maintains information on how the existing authorities have been applied previously. Lastly, the bill proposes to repeal the requirement for the Federal Land Assistance, Management, and Enhancement (FLAME) Act reporting, which the Agency supports because this reporting requirement, just like the FLAME Act itself, has been functionally supplanted by the ‘Fire Fix’ included in Public Law 115-141.

Regarding the bill, the Forest Service appreciates the intent of these provisions, to increase the pace and scale of the Agency’s treatments and improve accountability and accomplishment reporting, which align with the Agency’s current goals and efforts. The USDA would like to work with the Committee and bill sponsors to address our concerns.

S. 764 – “Colorado Outdoor Recreation and Economy (CORE) Act”

S.764 includes provisions that pertain to the management of several National Forests in Colorado, including the White River, Grand Mesa, Uncompahgre, and Gunnison National Forests. USDA’s testimony pertains only to the designations proposed on National Forest System lands, and we would defer to DOI on portions of the bill pertaining to the National Park Service and Bureau of Land Management.

S. 764 includes provisions pertaining to the designation of new Wilderness areas, the designation of wildlife conservation areas, mineral withdrawals, boundary modifications, the transfer of jurisdiction of National Forest System (NFS) lands, and other administrative provisions.

This bill would provide wilderness and special management protection on over 400,000 acres of land in Colorado and establish the Curecanti National Recreation Area (NRA), including transferring the administrative jurisdiction of approximately 2,500 acres of the Gunnison National Forest to the National Park Service as part of the NRA.

Regarding the provisions of the bill specific to the Forest Service, the significant and restrictive management designations in the bill are contrary to the Administration’s energy and mineral

dominance priorities. The designations are paired with permanent withdrawals that would prevent exploration and development opportunities, and thus, the USDA opposes the bill.

S. 888, “Oregon Recreation Enhancement Act”

S. 888 would expand an existing wilderness boundary, establish two national recreation areas, and would permanently withdraw two areas of federal land from the mining laws of the United States to protect them from new mining claims, other mineral leasing, and geothermal leasing. USDA’s testimony pertains only to the designations affecting the Forest Service and National Forest System lands, and USDA would defer to the DOI on portions of the bill pertaining to the Olympic National Park.

Section 4 of the bill expands the Wild Rogue Wilderness by an additional 59,512 acres of federal land and directs the Secretaries of Agriculture and Interior to administer the added lands under their jurisdiction. However, given the scale of the map of the added lands referenced in Section 4(a)(1), it is unclear if any acreage of National Forest System land is included in the proposed expansion.

Under P.L. 95-237, the Forest Service has administered a portion of the existing Wild Rogue Wilderness that is otherwise under the jurisdiction of the Bureau of Land Management. Under Section 4(b)(1)(A), the administration of this portion would shift back to Bureau of Land Management.

The maps referenced in Section 5(a)(2) of the bill depict NFS and Bureau of Land Management lands that would be subject to mineral withdrawal in Section 5(b). The two proposed withdrawal areas – known as Rough and Ready, Baldface and Hunter Creek Pistol River Headwaters – total 95,806 acres that are located on National Forest System lands on the Rogue River-Siskiyou National Forest. The remaining 5,216 acres are located on public land managed by the Department of the Interior, Bureau of Land Management. The USDA does not support the withdrawal as it would limit development of domestic critical minerals and burden our national and economic security.

Regarding the provisions of the bill specific to the Forest Service, the significant and restrictive management designations in the bill are contrary to the Administration’s timber production, energy and mineral dominance priorities. The designations are paired with permanent withdrawals that would prevent exploration and development opportunities, and thus, the USDA does not support the bill.

S. 902, “Wildfire Response and Preparedness Act”

S.902 directs the Secretaries of Agriculture and Interior agencies to establish a national wildfire response standard. The new standard requires that any ignition on federal lands be assessed within 30 minutes on the ground or aircraft followed by deployment of suppression assets within three hours. The bill requires that within one year the agencies submit a joint report to Congress containing: a single point of contact for fire response; unified fire budget request; description of key performance indicators (KPIs); assessment of the aviation and ground fleet needed to meet the new response standard; proposed improvements to the federal ordering and dispatch system;

description on how contracting mechanism would be streamlined; and recommendations for ensuring year-round availability of firefighting resources.

USDA agrees with the intent of S. 902 that it is critical to suppress most fires as swiftly as possible to minimize the direct amount of fireline exposure and to be ready for the next ignition. The Forest Service has a 98 percent success rate at initial attack, suppressing new starts within a single operational period (24 hours). USDA is developing performance metrics for wildfire response, including metrics related to average response times (among others) for inclusion in strategic and annual performance plans per the requirements of E.O. 14308, entitled: “Empowering Commonsense Wildfire Prevention and Response.” However, we have concerns regarding the implications of legislating a rapid response time to all new wildfires. Allocating resources to all new starts within a few hours regardless of their potential to grow will reduce the number of resources needed to attack high priority fires with potential to impact vulnerable high value resources, such as communities and infrastructure. In addition, there are instances when we cannot safely access a fire or extract injured personnel due to fire behavior or steep, inaccessible terrain. We look forward to working with the committee and bill sponsor to address these concerns.

S. 945 –Smith River National Recreation Area Expansion Act

S. 945, the Smith River National Recreation Area Expansion Act, would amend the Smith River National Recreation Area Act and the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act to include certain additions to the Smith River National Recreation Area and to designate specified Wild and Scenic Rivers in the State of Oregon. Enactment of this bill would result in the Smith River National Recreation Area being expanded from northern California to encompass the North Fork of the Smith River Watershed in southwestern Oregon. Additionally, approximately 75 miles within the watersheds of the North Fork and mainstem of the Smith River would be added to the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System.

USDA does not support the designation of wild and scenic rivers as they are contrary to the Administration’s commitment to energy dominance and economic growth.

S. 1005, “Southern Nevada Economic Development and Conservation Act”

S. 1005 includes several provisions related to the conservation and transfer of lands in Nevada, including the designation of additional lands as components of the National Wilderness Preservation System, most of which applies to the Department of the Interior. USDA equities include a new wilderness designation as well as two Forest Service conveyances to Clark County, Nevada. Section 301 designates approximately 72,942 acres of Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management lands as Mount Stirling Wilderness including lands within and exterior to the Mount Stirling Wilderness Study Area. Section 403 authorizes two Forest Service and one Bureau of Land Management conveyance to Clark County, Nevada subject to environmental review under the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969. USDA conveyances include a 12-acre parcel for the Mount Charleston Public Safety Complex and 1.5 acres for the Lee Canyon Fire Station. USDA defers to the Department of the Interior on portions of the bill pertaining to the Bureau of Land Management.

USDA opposes the Mount Stirling Wilderness provision in Section 301. We welcome the opportunity to review the wilderness map and would like to work with the sponsor and committee to clarify the Mount Stirling Wilderness boundary. The designation includes Clark County lands and excludes Nye County Mount Stirling Wilderness Study Area (WSA) lands as well as the wilderness area's namesake landmark Mount Stirling. Partially designating WSA lands, and not releasing them when designating wilderness, complicates management as the Forest Service would manage designated wilderness under the Wilderness Act of 1964 and WSA lands under the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976. USDA lands designated as Mount Stirling Wilderness outside of the WSA have not been managed for wilderness characteristics. We are also concerned that the wilderness boundary may cut off existing motorized routes in the Spring Mountains National Recreation Area. It is unclear if the historic Wheeler Charcoal Kilns Recreation Site is encompassed in the proposed wilderness boundary or if the boundary location will impact management of this site.

USDA supports the goals of the land conveyances in Section 403 and would like to work with the sponsor and committee to consider provisions regarding hazardous materials, utility right-of-way easements, and terms and conditions to ensure timely implementation of the bill.

S. 1228, "A bill to Amend the Public Lands Corps Act of 1993 to Modify the Cost-sharing Requirement for Conservation Projects Carried Out by a Qualified Youth or Conservation Corps"

S. 1228 increases the Forest Service's maximum federal cost share for conservation projects carried out by qualified youth or conservation corps from 75 percent to 90 percent, reducing the non-federal match from 25 percent to 10 percent.

Public Lands Corps (PLC) partners provide the Forest Service with essential labor and surge capacity. Their contributions are especially impactful in post-disaster recovery and other mission-critical agency projects. Increasing the allowable federal cost-share would require the Forest Service to contribute more funding that is not currently programmed and could lead to fewer locally funded projects. However, this change would broaden the pool of eligible cooperators, making it easier for more organizations to partner with the Forest Service in hosting Public Lands Corps participants for conservation work.

The Forest Service supports opportunities for youth and corps participation and to increase the number of projects completed on Federal lands. However, rather than a blanket reduction of the non-Federal cost-share to 10 percent for all projects, the USDA recommends amending the bill to provide the Secretary discretion to reduce the non-federal share to not less than 10 percent under certain circumstances. This targeted approach ensures flexibility for projects where meeting the 25 percent match is a demonstrated barrier, particularly for smaller corps, tribal partners, and organizations working in rural or underserved communities, while preserving incentives for cost-effective partnerships where non-Federal entities have the capacity to contribute more.

The USDA supports the intent of the bill and looks forward to working with the subcommittee as the bill moves forward.

S. 1319, “Pecos Watershed Protection Act”

S. 1319 would withdraw Forest Service land in northern New Mexico’s Upper Pecos Watershed from mineral entry and disposition and designate 11,599 acres as the Thompson Peak Wilderness Area. The Pecos area has a rich history of mining that dates to the 18th century when European settlements began to expand. The watershed, which originates on the Santa Fe National Forest, flows through a series of reservoirs and dams over 926 miles before becoming part of the Rio Grande in Texas.

In April 2025 the Forest Service cancelled its December 2024 request to the Bureau of Land Management to withdraw approximately 165,000 acres in the Upper Pecos River Watershed from location and entry under the mining laws, and leasing under mineral and geothermal laws. In accordance with our commitment to implementing Executive Order 14154, “Unleashing American Energy to Restore America’s Energy Independence,” USDA opposes this bill.

S. 1341, “Sarvis Creek Wilderness”

S. 1341 would amend the Colorado Wilderness Act of 1993 to add nearly 7,000 acres to the Sarvis Creek Wilderness.

Designated by Congress in 1993, the 44,556-acre Sarvis Creek Wilderness is located entirely in the State of Colorado and managed by the Medicine Bow-Routt National Forests and Thunder Basin National Grassland. The rugged, heavily wooded terrain rises in elevation from 7,004 to 10,734 feet. Unlike most Colorado wilderness areas, Sarvis contains no alpine tundra.

Regarding the provisions of the bill specific to the Forest Service, the significant and restrictive management designations in the bill are contrary to the Administration’s energy and mineral dominance priorities.

S. 1363, “New Mexico Land Grant-Mercedes Historical or Traditional Use Cooperation and Coordination Act”

S. 1363 directs the Departments of Agriculture and Interior to enter a Memorandum of Understanding with the New Mexico Land Grant Council to enhance cooperation and coordination between Federal agencies and qualified land grant-mercedes. The Memorandum would provide for the creation of subsidiary agreements for specific projects, lay out the permits and land use authorizations required to conduct specified activities, and clarify process for infrastructure improvements to sites with connection to a historical or traditional use as well as policies for notice and comment on land management planning decisions. S. 1363 also authorizes fee waivers and reductions for land use fees based on land grant-mercedes’ financial standing and requires that land grant-mercedes’ use of Federal lands be considered in land use planning.

National Forest System lands in northern New Mexico have a rich and unique history dating back hundreds of years. Natural resources are fundamental to the economic, social, and cultural vitality of the state, which is home to federally recognized tribes and pueblos, land grant-mercedes, acequia associations, and traditional Hispanic communities, among others. USDA supports S. 1363 and would like to work with the Committee and bill sponsor on technical assistance.

S. 1476, “M.H. Dutch Salmon Greater Gila Wild and Scenic River Act”

S. 1476 amends the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act to designate 69 segments of the Gila River and Rio Grande River systems in New Mexico as components of the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System and modifies the boundaries of the Gila National Forest to exclude land transferred to the Secretary of Interior under this bill.

In 2015 the Gila National Forest commenced a land management plan revision process that includes an evaluation of wild and scenic rivers eligibility for all named river segments on the forest; the plan revision is currently being finalized. There are 25 river segments proposed for designation in S. 1476 that flow through the Gila and have not been identified by the Forest Service as eligible in this public planning process. This means that the Forest Service has not found those segments to be “free flowing” and have at least one river-related value identified as “outstandingly remarkable” when considered within the identified region of comparison. In addition, the Gila has yet to conduct the final step in the river study process, the determination of suitability, for any of the proposed segments.

USDA does not support the designation of wild and scenic rivers as they are contrary to the Administration’s commitment to energy dominance and economic growth. Further, USDA notes that these federal lands have not been analyzed and found suitable through the land management planning process. The proposed transfer of land from the Gila National Forest to the Gila Cliff Dwellings National Monument has the potential to alleviate maintenance concerns for facilities, and USDA looks forward to working with the Committee to ensure multiple uses would not be affected by the proposed transfer.

S. 1737, “Wild Olympics Wilderness and Wild and Scenic Rivers Act”

S. 1737 would designate new and expand existing Wilderness areas, potential Wilderness areas, and certain rivers in the Olympic National Forest and Olympic National Park as wild and scenic rivers. The Administration does not support designations that are contrary to our commitment to energy dominance and economic growth.

Of the 19 rivers proposed for wild and scenic river designation in the bill, 13 include segments flowing through NFS lands. Portions of two of those rivers, the Duckabush River and the Dungeness River, were found eligible and suitable for designation under the 1990 Olympic National Forest Land Management Plan. Twelve rivers proposed for designation fall at least partially within Olympic National Park. The river segments in areas managed by the National Park Service were found eligible and suitable for designation through National Park Service studies. The Department looks forward to working with the sponsor and the Committee to ensure that any new designations would be appropriately integrated into the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System.

S. 1860, “Brian Head Town Land Conveyance Act”

S. 1860, Brian Head Town Land Conveyance Act would transfer approximately 24 acres from the Dixie National Forest in Utah, including any land improvements, to Brian Head Town, Utah. USDA must transfer the parcel as soon as practicable (without consideration) to Brian Head Town for a public works facility, or any other uses determined necessary by the Town. The bill also requires the Forest Service to modify the Dixie National Forest boundary following the

conveyance. The conveyance is also subject to terms and conditions as determined by the Secretary of Agriculture.

USDA supports the intent of the bill, and the Forest Service would like to work with the sponsor and committee on technical assistance. Technical corrections could help ensure timely conveyance and include standard language regarding hazardous materials disposal; survey and legal description provisions; clarifying whether the National Environmental Policy Act and consultation under the Endangered Species and National Historic Preservation Acts apply; and providing for valid existing rights and public access.

S. 2016, “Chugach Alaska Land Exchange Oil Spill Recovery Act”

S 2016 directs a land exchange between the federal government and Chugach Alaska Corporation (CAC) subject to valid existing rights. As proposed, the legislation requires an exchange of 231,036 acres of subsurface estate owned by CAC for 65,403 acres of fee simple land owned by the federal government including 63,414 acres of National Forest System (NFS) lands managed by the Forest Service. The land exchange is required not later than one year following enactment, if the CAC offers to convey all rights, title and interest in and to the non-federal land. Additionally, the legislation directs federal acquisition of approximately 100,000 acres of CAC subsurface estate that underlies non-federal surface estate – where the surface estate is owned by Native village corporations or the State of Alaska.

The proposed legislation references the 2022 Chugach Region Land Study and Report (CLS), which was required by the Dingell Act and submitted to Congress by the Department of the Interior in December 2022. USDA worked in coordination with DOI and in consultation with the CAC to produce the study and identify sufficient acres of accessible and economically viable federal land that can be offered in exchange for CAC land identified by CAC as available for exchange.

The Forest Service supports the intention of this bill. The land exchange proposed in this bill is intended to reconcile certain overlapping land interests, in surface and subsurface ownership, that have caused jurisdictional and conservation issues in the region. This bill supplements the policy goals of the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act, in an effort to ensure the continued prosperity of the communities that depend on these lands while fostering responsible stewardship.

The Forest Service looks forward to working with the bill sponsors and Committee to resolve any issues on the parcels identified in the bill for exchange that were not originally identified by the Agencies in the 2022 study and report.

S. 2033, “Cross-Boundary Wildfire Solutions Act”

S. 2033 directs the Comptroller General of the Government Accountability Office (GAO) to conduct a study of how effectively wildfire mitigation efforts operate across federal, state, local, and tribal lands. The study would examine existing programs, rules, and authorities – focusing on the Healthy Forests Restoration Act of 2003, assessing their ability to enable and increase funding for wildfire mitigation efforts across federal and non-federal lands. The study will also assess how to improve mitigation capacity and provide recommendations.

The Forest Service supports the intent of this bill. The agency suggests broadening the focus beyond the Healthy Forests Restoration Act of 2003 as most of the agency's wildfire mitigation efforts are conducted under other authorities. The agency anticipates learning from the outcomes of the study to improve wildfire mitigation efforts.

S. 2042, "Roadless Area Conservation Act"

S. 2042 directs that the Secretary of Agriculture shall not allow road construction, road reconstruction, or logging in an inventoried roadless area where those activities are prohibited by the 2001 Roadless Rule.

The 2001 Roadless Rule, referenced in the proposed legislation, established prohibitions on road construction, road reconstruction, and timber harvesting in nearly 60 million acres of inventoried roadless areas, with limited exceptions. Today, the 2001 Roadless Rule applies to nearly 45 million acres of National Forest System lands, including in Alaska.

On June 23rd, 2025, U.S. Department of Agriculture Secretary Brooke L. Rollins announced the intent to rescind the 2001 Roadless Area Conservation Rule. On August 29th, 2025, the U.S. Forest Service published a notice of intent to prepare an environmental impact statement to evaluate the effects of the proposed rulemaking published in the Federal Register.

Managing inventoried roadless areas to maintain their roadless character through a national rule adds administrative burden and does not efficiently support multiple use management of National Forest System lands. This action seeks to reinstate a reliance upon the flexibility of the local land management planning process. The Secretary's action responds to the need for national forests to take swift action to reduce wildfire risk and help protect surrounding communities and infrastructure.

The USDA opposes S.2042. For nearly 25 years, the Roadless Rule has frustrated land managers and served as a barrier to action – prohibiting road construction, which has limited wildfire suppression and timber harvesting on millions of acres of National Forest System lands. Of the nearly 45 million acres of inventoried roadless areas covered under the 2001 Roadless Rule, 40 percent, or about 18 million acres, currently have a high or very high wildfire hazard potential. Rescinding this rule will allow this land to be managed at the local forest level, with more flexibility to take action to reduce wildfire risk and help protect surrounding communities and infrastructure. Since 2001, we have seen more than 8 million acres of Roadless Areas burn. To put that into perspective, the average acreage lost to wildfire each year has more than doubled since the rule's inception. Instead of protecting our forests, the rule has trapped them in a cycle of neglect and devastation.

Secretary Rollins has committed to managing our forests in a way that will reduce wildfire risk, provide a stable domestic timber supply, create jobs, improve wildlife habitat, and unleash numerous other benefits. The Forest Service appreciates the Committee's support for the Agency's multiple use mission and looks forward to continuing discussions on the benefits of returning decision making to local land managers.

S. 2262, “American Voices in Federal Lands Act”

S. 2262, "American Voices in Federal Lands Act," would amend the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976 to clarify the nature of “public involvement” for rulemaking relating to federal lands. The bill specifically modifies the definition of public involvement to mean participation by “citizens of the United States.” It also proposes requirements that federal agencies implement a “Completely Automated Public Test to tell Computers and Humans Apart” (CAPTCHA) process to deter non-human or automated comments, including those generated by artificial intelligence (AI), from influencing regulatory decisions.

The USDA recognizes and supports the bill’s intent to ensure that public comments influencing federal lands policy derive from genuine U.S. citizens, especially considering emerging technologies that could inundate comment periods with AI-generated inputs and raise concerns about the integrity of the public participation process.

However, USDA would also appreciate the opportunity to work with the Committee and bill sponsor to fully understand the concerns driving this legislation. The Department is mindful that any new statutory language or technical fixes must balance the goals of transparency, fairness, and effectiveness while allowing enough flexibility to keep pace with technological advancements in public participation methods. There may be further opportunities for developing iterative and adaptive approaches to implementing such changes to avoid unintended consequences or administrative burdens.

Conclusion

The USDA appreciates the opportunity to share our view on these bills and looks forward to working with the bill sponsors and Committee to resolve our concerns.